



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF  
**PLANT HEALTH**  
2020



## Everyday plant health heroes Protecting plants, protecting life

### Linda Smith

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#### How did you choose your job? Or did it choose you?

I completed a bachelor of Agricultural Science (Hons) at the University of Western Australia in 1987. My favourite subject was Plant Pathology. My first job was working in a Tissue Culture Laboratory in a small rural town north of Perth that specialized in West Australian wildflowers. I gained a whole range of new skills and experiences which led to me moving to Brisbane, Queensland in 1988. In 1989 I was employed by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries (now Department of Agriculture & Fisheries) as a Plant Pathologist in a research role. I completed my Masters and PhD while working full time. Although the crops and diseases I have worked on have changed over the years I have been able to continue working in an area I absolutely love all of my career in the Queensland Government.

#### How long have you worked in this industry?

I have been a Plant Pathologist for 31 years with DAF based in Brisbane, Queensland.

#### What does plant health mean to you?

For me plant health does not only focus on the control of plant disease, which is vital to sustainable and profitable crop production, it also encompasses a healthy ecosystem. Taking a more holistic approach to crop production is vital. I believe that our stewardship of the land right now is critical to ensure that crop production is going to be able to meet the production challenges of the future.

#### What are your greatest achievements in this role?

Identifying reniform nematode was a significant achievement because parasitic nematodes in cotton in Australia was not a problem that had ever been on our radar. The team and I undertook extensive surveys to determine the distribution of this pest which then led to new research and management strategies for growers in CQ to manage this issue. This event also provided an opportunity for the team to come together and learn new skills, engage closely with the cotton community in CQ and we developed personally through this experience. In this role I have been fortunate to collaborate with amazing people and be involved in new areas of research that has/will offer new tools to manage diseases of cotton: soil health and disease suppression, Verticillium wilt soil mapping, silicon fertilization, BioClay.

#### What does a typical day look like for you?

My days vary quite a bit. Twice a year I am in the field conducting disease surveys across Queensland cotton growing regions to determine what diseases are present. Other times visiting farms where there is a disease concern or unusual symptoms that needs investigating. We conduct field trials investigating management strategies for Verticillium wilt which requires all hands on deck and involves soil collection, stem cutting and disease assessment. In the lab I still get to look down a microscope to assist in pathogen identification. I am currently setting up glasshouse experiments to assess virulence of Verticillium isolates as part of a collaborative project. Sometimes I spend days on end at the computer doing paperwork and answering enquiries by email and on the phone.

#### What advice would you give anybody wanting to get into the industry?

Take every chance to learn new skills and when an opportunity presents itself seize it no matter how scary it seems. Ask people within the industry to mentor you. Be flexible, you never know where the journey may lead you.